

# Byron L. Dorgan

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## **DORGAN SAYS FIRST SESSION OF 106<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS HAD SOME SUCCESSES BUT MORE DISAPPOINTMENTS**

(BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA) – U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) today said the just-concluded session of Congress had “some successes” but contained “far more disappointments.” Speaking at a year-end wrap up press conference here, Dorgan said the biggest disappointment was the failure of Congress to change the permanent farm law to provide a decent safety net for family farmers. Under pressure from Dorgan and others, Congress finally passed an \$8.7 billion emergency farm disaster aid package, but Dorgan said that’s “no substitute for changing the underlying farm law that has clearly failed family farmers during a time of collapsed prices.”

Other major disappointments of the 1999 session included the decision by the majority in Congress to side with big insurance companies when it refused to pass a Patients’ Bill of Rights to address abuses that exist in some managed care organizations. Congress also failed to provide Medicare prescription drug coverage and rejected an initiative to help local communities rebuild and modernize schools and reduce overcrowding. Despite a rash of school shootings that killed dozens of students and teachers, Congress also refused to pass a juvenile crime bill that would have helped make schools safer. The Senate’s rejection of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, was “a step backwards in efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons,” Dorgan said. The failure to reform campaign finance laws was also a significant disappointment, Dorgan said.

Successes from the session included the virtual elimination of budget deficits, restoration of Medicare cuts, substantial funding increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to research killer diseases, and approval of an initiative to help reduce school class sizes by helping communities hire 100,000 new teachers. “There were a few bright spots, but not enough to call this session a success,” Dorgan said.

In other news, Dorgan said:

- He and Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD), as Co-Chairs of the Democratic Policy Committee, will co-chair agriculture hearings in January aimed at writing a new farm bill, since the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee has said he will not hold such hearings. “We need to hear from family farmers and farm organizations about the current program and put some pressure on Congress to change the current farm policy that is choking the economic life out of family farmers,” Dorgan said.
- The On-A-Slant Village near Mandan will receive \$400,000 in Fiscal Year 2000 to continue restoration efforts at the historic Indian village. It’s the second installment of federal funding that Dorgan added to appropriations bills and will help pay for restoration of the earth lodges and palisades at the village. “I hope that this second installment of appropriations funding for the On-A-Slant Village will help provide a historical analysis of the tribe’s importance to the state,” Dorgan said. “The village provides a unique way for the American people to see and understand how this Indian tribe lived. And were it not for the Mandan Indians, the Lewis and Clark Expedition might not have succeeded.” Dorgan said the restoration of this village will also be a boost for tourism in North Dakota.
- Dorgan said he is concerned that U.S. negotiators at the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks in Seattle once again appeared prepared to sign up for substantial reductions in domestic price support programs, action which could further injure family farmers. “We have a big stake in forcing open foreign markets and reducing tariffs around the world,” he said. “The WTO trade talks, done right, could accomplish both of those goals. However, our negotiators are once again talking with other countries about a provision that would call for ‘dramatic reductions’ in domestic support prices. That makes no sense at all. Every country that wants to preserve its network of family farms must preserve the right to have a safety net to help farmers through tough times.”

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